

# Want better brain power? Play video games

By Chicago Tribune, adapted by Newsela staff on 02.04.15

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Noah Bakshis, 15, plays a computer video game titled "Dust: An Elysian Tail" at his home in Plainfield, Illinois. Photo: John J. Kim/Chicago Tribune/TNS

CHICAGO — Roman Rivera grew up crazy about video games. He avoided his mom's screen-time limits by secretly playing his Game Boy after bedtime. Now that he is 21, he spends up to four hours a day battling enemies in "Dota 2."

Yet Rivera was an "A" student in high school. Today, he is studying at the University of Chicago, one of the country's best universities. Gaming helped him to get there, he said.

Rivera said video games led him to be interested in more things. He believes they also made him smarter. "Without a doubt they have benefited me." He may be right.

## Too Busy To Bully

New studies have found that gaming might have value. Scientists have recently linked gaming with better brain power, decision-making and even physical fitness.

"It seems to have really interesting positive effects," said Daphne Bavelier. She researches video games at the University of Rochester in New York.

Professors have done thousands of studies on gaming since the 1980s. Most of them found that gaming is bad for kids. The studies linked video games to violence and weight gain.

A new generation of scientists more familiar with technology has come along. Different results have often appeared, said Christopher Ferguson, a professor at Stetson University in Florida.

Ferguson found that violent video games do not necessarily make kids violent. Instead, children who play violent games may be less likely to be bullies, he said.

Ferguson guessed that kids use video games to get out strong feelings. They also might be so busy "they don't have time to bully other kids," he said.

## **And Too Busy For Junk Food**

Another take on video-game violence came from University of Buffalo professor Matthew Grizzard.

He found that kids who played the evil characters in shooter games often felt bad about it.

Gaming has often been linked to being overweight. Professor Chennan Liu found the opposite. People who play video games for three to six hours a day were thinner than those who played less, she found.

Kids playing video games move around more than if they were just watching TV, she said. They also seemed to be less likely to pick up a snack or a soda.

That theory made sense to Dan Wojtowicz, age 18. He is a high school student in Illinois. Wojtowicz spends up to seven hours a day playing video games.

He said when he goes on long gaming streaks he does not feel as hungry. "I can go without eating for three to four hours."

## **Brain Games**

The most interesting studies look at how gaming affects the brain. Simone Kuhn is a scientist in Berlin, Germany. She found that areas of the brain grow stronger in people who play games. The changes could improve memory and the ability to understand directions and travel around.

Not everyone agrees that gaming is good for you. Joseph Bisoglio has studied gaming at Columbia University Medical Center in New York. He said that scientific studies do not compare gaming with other activities that exercise the brain. Learning a new language or a musical instrument may be better for the brain than gaming, he said.

Doug Bakshis questioned the value of gaming when his son began to play for hours at a time. His son, Noah, has a type of autism. The disability affects his social skills. But then Noah started opening up more.

Noah, now 15, said gaming has made him more interested in the world. He saw archery and Japanese culture in video games. Now he is studying them in the real world. His attention and ability to concentrate have also improved.

So have his skills at making decisions. Now he tries to deal with things peacefully, he said.

Gamers can get really attached to the characters in video games, "and that's not a bad thing," Noah said.

## Quiz

- 1 Which sentence from the introduction [paragraphs 1-3] explains one possible advantage of playing video games?
- (A) Yet Rivera was an "A" student in high school.
  - (B) Now that he is 21, he spends up to four hours a day battling enemies in "Dota 2."
  - (C) Today, he is studying at the University of Chicago, one of the country's best universities.
  - (D) "Without a doubt they have benefited me."
- 2 Which paragraph from the section "Too Busy To Bully" explains why studies about video games have changed over time?
- (A) New studies have found that gaming might have value. Scientists have recently linked gaming with better brain power, decision-making and even physical fitness.
  - (B) "It seems to have really interesting positive effects," said Daphne Bavelier. She researches video games at the University of Rochester in New York.
  - (C) A new generation of scientists more familiar with technology has come along. Different results have often appeared, said Christopher Ferguson, a professor at Stetson University in Florida.
  - (D) Ferguson found that violent video games do not necessarily make kids violent. Instead, children who play violent games may be less likely to be bullies, he said.
- 3 Which of the following sentences from the article BEST summarizes the article?
- (A) Not everyone agrees that gaming is good for you.
  - (B) He found that areas of the brain grow stronger in people who play games.
  - (C) Doug Bakshis questioned the value of gaming when his son began to play for hours at a time.
  - (D) Gamers can get really attached to the characters in video games, "and that's not a bad thing," Noah said.

4 Which of the following sentences from the article supports the main idea of the article?

- (A) Gaming has often been linked to being overweight.
- (B) People who play video games for three to six hours a day were thinner than those who played less, she found.
- (C) Another take on video-game violence came from University of Buffalo professor Matthew Grizzard.
- (D) "I can go without eating for three to four hours."

## Answer Key

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